

## Comment on FCC proceeding 17-108

The Internet is the most important communication technology of our lifetimes; it's only been widely available for 25 years, but it's transformed American society and the world. However, it's still in its infancy, and it's still a new and emerging technology — one whose promise can be strangled by cable and phone companies that understandably act entirely in their own interests. The FCC, however, must continue to act as a steward of the wider public interest by maintaining strong Title II protections, protecting the Internet from being irrevocably harmed by a few self-interested companies that would like to set themselves up as gatekeepers and extract a toll from anyone passing by.

When I pay Comcast or T-Mobile for Internet access, I expect to receive exactly that: access to the entire Internet, without limitations based on their business interests. When I pick up the phone and call a local cab company, I don't expect to be disconnected because Uber paid the phone company to only accept calls to Uber; I expect to get through to the cab company. The same exact principle applies here: if I go to cab-company.com, I expect to get through without being blocked or slowed down. I don't expect and don't want my ISP to act as a gatekeeper, inserting themselves between me and the services I wish to use.

My expectations for my ISP don't preclude all limitations on that service, and ISPs are private companies that need to turn a profit. Certainly I expect a speed restriction, and while I want the fastest access possible, pricing models that charge more for higher speeds are perfectly reasonable. I also think that ISP-provided add-on services are reasonable, such as customized email services or special access to video libraries. There are, in short, quite a few acceptable ways for ISPs to make money and to differentiate themselves from their competitors that don't violate net neutrality protections and don't violate consumer expectations for Internet access. ISPs have successfully done this since Title II protections were put in place in 2015 and can continue to do so.

All of this raises an important question — if the FCC reclassifies ISPs as information services and my provider starts cutting deals that fundamentally change my Internet access, why wouldn't I just switch to a new provider? The answer, of course, is that I have very few choices. In my area, Comcast is the only choice for high speed wireline access. I have a few more choices for mobile access, but it's no substitute for wired access, and even then there are only three viable providers. I have very little choice, so either I deal with whatever restrictions my ISP chooses to put in place, or I disconnect from the modern world.

To sum up, I don't want my ISP to become a toll booth that selectively allows me access to what they see fit. What precisely could those restrictions look like, and how would they affect me?

First, I'm a professional software engineer for a software company, and our customers have high security requirements. I am fortunate enough to be able to work from home from time to time, but to maintain the appropriate level of security, my company utilizes a Virtual Private Network (VPN) from a particular company. What would I do if Comcast demanded that I pay more for their "VPN tier"? What would I do if they demanded I only use their new Comcast VPN service, but that service didn't meet my employer's security requirements? I have many

coworkers who work entirely out of their homes -- what would they do in such a situation? Would we be able to continue employing them? Would we have to lower our security standards, thus putting our product and our customers' data at risk?

Additionally, at my employer we provide our software "in the cloud", but we have larger and better-funded competitors. If Title II protections were removed, would those competitors be able to pay our customers' ISPs to slow down their access to our services, or extract a toll from us to let our software through their gates? Our competitors could've killed our young company, not in the arena of features and product quality, but by paying ISPs to cut off our access to potential customers and new markets. ISPs could have killed our company by demanding tolls we couldn't afford, putting us on the wrong side of profitability.

Outside of work, I frequently make use of Twitter and Facebook to connect with my elected representatives -- both to learn what they're currently addressing and to let them know what I'm concerned about, whether that's a concern about a missing street sign or health care legislation. From the Tea Party to Indivisible, the most influential political movements of recent years have all used the Internet as a meeting place and an organizing tool, sometimes utilizing new technology to do that. Where would the Tea Party have been if ISPs had been allowed to prioritize nytimes.com over foxnews.com? How many people would be in the Indivisible movement if ISPs didn't automatically allow access to the original Google Doc used as a founding document? The Internet lowers barriers to entry in the political process, opening it to all.

Finally, I'm fortunate enough to have some adorable nieces and nephews, but they don't live nearby, and I don't get to see them that often. Thanks to the magic of the Internet, I can get in touch with my brothers at any time and see my nieces and nephews for no cost on top of my flat fee to my ISP -- I'm not required to use a Comcast service, I'm not charged extra for a "video calling" tier, it just works.

Fundamentally, that's the promise of the Internet -- I plug in and it just works; I can connect to whatever catches my fancy, whether it's a YouTube video on gardening or an obscure blog about human rights in Cambodia. My ISP doesn't get to play the role of gatekeeper, encouraging me to their services and discouraging or disabling me from using others. I get to pick and choose the best service available.

Contrary to its title, this proposal doesn't "restore" Internet freedom, it hands power of the Internet over to a few gatekeepers. The FCC must take the needs of all stakeholders into account -- not just huge ISPs, and not just large Internet companies, but also the millions of Americans who will be hurt by these changes. It must take a role in ensuring that the Internet is able to develop for the benefit of all, rather than being strangled by a few private interests. The FCC must vote no on proceeding 17-108 and maintain strong Title II protections for Internet access.